

## **Mama's Boy by [dishwater\\_blondie](#)**

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**Summary:**

Will's dad comes to visit him the day after his birthday, and Will is right to have a bad feeling about it.

But he's not the same scared little kid he used to be.

## **Mama's Boy**

### **Author's Note:**

Since we never actually got to see Will interacting with his father in the show, I really wanted to take a stab at a confrontation between them that would occur around the time Season 4 is set to take place. Enjoy!

Will's dad is standing on the front stoop.

Wearing a pair of cheap sunglasses and grinding a half-smoked cigarette beneath the toe of his boot, Lonnie Byers reaches for the doorbell a second time, and with the curtains parted by the width of two fingers, Will stands there in the living room watching dumbstruck.

“Who is it?” he hears Mike call from the dining room as the house fills with another impatient chime. Will doesn’t respond. He can hardly believe his eyes. He figures the chances he’s only imagining his father there are too great to give an answer.

Lonnie tries to peer through the frosted glass on the front door, and when he doesn’t make anything out, he turns his gaze back out to the driveway, empty but for the unfamiliar sedan that must’ve been the rental he’d driven from – wherever cars can be rented around here. Will has serious doubts Lonnie put the hours into driving halfway across the country himself. Running his tobacco-stained fingers through his hair, Lonnie’s shoulders rise and fall with a sigh. He throws one final glance at the door before he starts to descend the concrete steps.

A sudden surge of panic shoots through Will’s chest, the reality of the moment finally striking him like a hammer. He abandons the curtains for the front door and turns the lock.

“Dad?” he says as he very nearly tears the thing off its hinges trying to get it open before Lonnie reaches the car. Pausing in the middle of the lawn, Lonnie spins back around. Behind his dark glasses, he sizes

Will up in the door frame, and the corner of his lip lifts into smirk.

“Holy shit,” Lonnie exclaims. “Look at you, huh? Finally hit that growth spurt.”

Immediately, there is that feeling of being *seen* Will had gone so long without sensing, a feeling he could only attribute to the beady, watchful stare of his father growing up, a signal for the muttered comment he would make under his breath in the seconds to follow. Will would feel like all his skin had been stripped away, like he stood there exposed to the elements without his body’s most basic line of defense against the world pulsing and living all around him. He resists the urge to squirm, attempting to harden his exterior with the mindful elevation of his chin. “What are you doing here?”

Lonnie laughs like it’s obvious. “What do you think, son?” He pulls something out of his back pocket, a green envelope marked with his name in permanent marker. “Figure I’d surprise you for your birthday.”

“My birthday was yesterday,” Will replies, unimpressed.

“Come on, kid, I know that. Didn’t want to intrude on any plans you had.” Lonnie returns to the front stoop and hands Will the envelope. He stares at it, uninterested in what’s inside while his mind scrambles to come up with some sort of response to the absurdity of the situation. His dad, Lonnie Byers, showing up unannounced to their new house two thousand miles away to hand him a birthday card without so much as a phone call since 1983. Will might laugh if he wasn’t so uneasy.

All he says is, “Thanks.”

“Your brother home?” asks Lonnie, looking over Will’s shoulder into the house.

“He’s working.”

“And your mom?”

“Same.” Will actually isn’t sure where his mother is. Joyce had left pretty suddenly that morning before dawn, waking Will and El briefly

to tell them everything was fine; she was just going on a trip for a few days and would be back before the next weekend. When Will had gotten out of bed that morning and realized he hadn't dreamt that moment, Jonathan mentioned something about Murray Bauman, that journalist guy who'd shown up last summer to help them close the gate beneath Starcourt Mall. All of them had been chewing on some pretty troublesome questions the last several hours – but Lonnie doesn't need to know any of that. Honestly, the sooner he thinks Joyce will be back, the better this whole situation might turn out.

Lonnie removes his sunglasses and hangs him off the neckline of his t-shirt. “Yeah, thought so. Alright, then.” He gestures to the house. “You gonna show me around the place?”

“Oh – uh, yeah, I – I guess.” Will can't get over how weird this feels. Momentarily, he forgets how to operate his legs before stepping aside to let Lonnie through the door. “Come in.”

That same naked feeling Will has when his father stares at him, he gets as Lonnie sweeps his gaze around the front entryway and adjoining living room. He surely recognizes a lot of the same furniture they've always owned, notes that the place has a staircase leading to a second story but really doesn't look that much bigger than the old house back in Hawkins. It isn't nice. Will can admit that, but it never bothered him until Lonnie set his eyes on it for himself. All the sudden, he wishes the place was spotless, shiny and elegant like everything his family isn't. And then he hates himself for wanting that.

Lonnie's eyes land on a photograph hanging above the sofa for an especially long pair of seconds. It's just a portrait of Will, Jonathan, and Joyce taken at his middle school graduation last year, but Will holds his breath waiting for Lonnie to look away.

“So, it's the three of you here?” he says, walking over to adjust an old hand-made throw blanket draped across the arm of the sofa. “Certainly looks like you've made yourselves at home.”

“Well, it's been almost six months,” murmurs Will.

“You like it here?”

“Yeah,” he lies.

“Jonathan like it here?”

“Yeah.” That’s not a lie. Probably not, anyway. Jonathan seems to like it the most out of any of them, but then again, that really isn’t saying much.

Lonnie’s about to ask another question when a voice calls out from the other room. “Who’s there, Will?”

A moment later, Mike and El appear, both pausing as soon as they see Lonnie sifting through the magazines and newspapers fanned out across the coffee table.

“Oh, Will,” Lonnie says, eyes shifting between the newcomers, “You didn’t tell me I was intruding on something. I didn’t know you had friends over.”

“I mean – no, no, you’re not – no,” Will stammers. He puts himself between his father and his friends, flicking his index finger back and forth. “They’re just – they’re just here.”

Lonnie blinks at his son. “You gonna introduce me?”

“Right. Right. Uh, guys,” he says to Mike and El. “This is my Dad. Lonnie. Mr. Byers. Whatever. And, Dad, this is Mike. He’s visiting from Hawkins for Spring Break. And that’s – that’s –” Will flounders to decide which name to give. Teachers and most other adults have gotten to know Eleven as Jane Hopper, but she tends to introduce herself by her nickname. As he stands there stuttering, it occurs to him El’s is a complicated story that might be best kept hidden.

She steps forward and holds out her hand. “El.”

“What was that? Ellen?”

“Just El.”

Lonnie takes her hand and shakes it.

“I remember you, Mr. Byers,” says Mike, also putting out his hand.

There's a wariness in his dark eyes and from what Will can tell, his grip his firm. "We've met a couple times."

"Long ago, I'm sure." Lonnie isn't looking at Mike. His attention is on Eleven, who stands with crossed arms and her weight shifting from foot to foot. "You're unfamiliar, Miss. You live here?"

"Yes," El replies, not realizing what Lonnie means by that. Will's stomach is in a knot.

"Care to tell me why my son's so sheepish about you?"

"What?"

"Ah, I just mean I notice him stumbling over his words," Lonnie explains with a wink in Will's direction. "Unfortunately I can't expect my sons to be as smooth as me when it comes to the ladies."

Will colors. "Dad –"

El asks again, "What?"

"Dad, no, she's not – she's dating *Mike*." Will points to his best friend, who demonstrably takes El's hand from her arm and links his fingers between her own.

Lonnie raises an eyebrow. "My bad, then. Shouldn't have assumed you and *my son*..." There's an edge to his voice that makes Will bristle, but Lonnie clears his throat and continues, "Now, you'll have to forgive me, but I'm a little confused. Mike's from Hawkins, isn't he?"

Mike narrows his eyes. "That's right."

"And El here's from around here. How're they...?"

"I'm from Hawkins too," El says.

"I thought you said you lived here," Lonnie replies.

"I do. I live here." El points to the floor.

“In this house?”

“Yes?”

“You mean permanently? Not just for the week?”

“I live here all the time. With the Byers,” El says, and as if the situation is in need of further clarification, she points to the photo on the wall.

“Hm.”

“Dad,” Will interrupts, “Let’s – continue the house tour, maybe?”

Lonnie’s gaze lingers longer than necessary on Eleven before he glances back at his son. “Sure thing. Actually, before we do, where’s the bathroom?”

Will shows the way, and as soon as he’s gone, Mike grabs him by the arm and asks in a hushed tone, “What the hell is he doing here?”

“I don’t know.”

“He’s your dad?” El whispers.

“Yes. I haven’t talked to him in –” Will actually has to think for a moment “– three years?”

“Why would he just show up here unannounced after that long?” Mike demands.

“I. Don’t. Know.” Will grabs the back of his neck and sighs. “Look, I’m gonna show him around, I’ll tell him Mom is coming back soon –”

“But she isn’t,” El interjects.

“I’ll lie. And he’ll take off at that point because I doubt he wants anything to do with her.” *Even though I thought he wanted nothing to do with me.* “You guys can finish the game on your own. I’m not gonna ask you to help keep him entertained.”

“You sure?”

“You look nervous.”

“Yeah, well, that’s not exactly new,” Will grumbles.

They are both reluctant. Mike hasn’t had very many interactions with Will’s father at all, and they were hardly long enough to leave an impression, but he’s well aware of how Lonnie had left them. Most of his knowledge comes from gossip he’s overheard from his mother, no doubt, since Will has always avoided talking about it. El, on the other hand, hasn’t been told anything as far as Will is aware, but her instinct for trouble is strong. She glares in the direction of the bathroom as she and Mike return to the dining room to resume the game of poker they’d all been playing with egg-shaped Easter chocolates as bartering chips.

When Lonnie comes back, Will gives him a half-hearted tour of the rest of the first floor before leading him up the stairs to his room. He realizes he’s still holding the green envelope. Its crisp edges have softened with the sweat of his tightly-clutched grip. Will grimaces and tosses the thing onto his desk atop a pile of half-finished drawings, and seeing these, all his delicate linework and soft choices of color, he collects them quickly. Will finds one sketch of a snarling, decaying zombie face and slips it on top of the others. His skin crawls with the feeling of a thousand spiders waterfalls down his back.

“You share with your brother?” Lonnie asks, noticing the two beds.

“Yeah,” he sighs as he starts straightening the other items on his desk. “El’s got her own room.”

“So that girl’s really here to stay?” Lonnie scrutinizes the view out the window on Jonathan’s side of the room, hands jammed into the pockets of his jeans. “How the hell did your mother end up with a third kid out of nowhere?”

Will swallows roughly.

“Last I checked she was barely keeping it together with two.”

“Um –” Will glances away as Lonnie’s eyes turn on him swiftly. “She’s managing,” he murmurs.

“Yeah, I never really asked, did I?” Lonnie looks over the stack of cassette tapes and CDs on Jonathan’s dresser. “How is your mother, Will?”

He hesitates maybe half-a-second too long. Joyce is very much not fine, but Will isn’t about to admit that to his father. Even apart from her spontaneous disappearance, it’s not like she’s all that willing to bear her scars to her children while she knows they have their own to hide and heal. Will has tried to get her to talk to him or *somebody* at least, but her fake smile is well-practiced, and right now, he knows she’d appreciate him pretending not to notice anything wrong at all.

“She’s doing alright,” he answers.

“Is that so?”

“How are *you*, Dad?” Will asks, folding his arms and leaning against the desk.

A small smile creeps across Lonnie’s lips. “I’m doing great, son.” He pulls a CD from the pile, scoffs, and then returns it. “How do you and your brother listen to this garbage?”

“It’s good.”

“Later I can have you take the car out for a spin, and we can listen to some real music.” Next, Lonnie picks up Jonathan’s camera. “He still into this?”

“Yeah.”

“Thought he’d outgrow it. What about you, you still like art?”

Will self-consciously shifts to the right to block his dad’s view of his drawings. “Sometimes.”

“I’ve got a buddy who works in forensic art and reconstruction. That’s something you could get into.”

“I...don’t know if that’d be my thing.”

“Eh, you never know. Pretty badass stuff.” Lonnie places the camera

back down. “You know, your mom used to like this shit a long time ago.”

“She still does.”

“Stopped having time for it once you boys came around,” he went on, as if he hadn’t heard Will. “How ‘bout that girl, huh? She into photographs and art and whatnot?”

“Not – not really,” Will replies. “I mean, she likes mine. I did a sketch of her once. I probably have it around here –”

“You never told me how you ended up with her,” Lonnie interrupts. He’s starting to make his way from Jonathan’s side of the room over to Will’s, gaze scraping over the movie posters on the wall. “This like a foster care situation or something?”

“No?” Will tries to back further against his desk, but there is nowhere for him to go. “She – we took her in ‘cause – remember Chief Hopper, Dad?”

“Oh, how could I forget that son-of-a-bitch?” Lonnie mumbles, shaking his head. “He died in that fire I been hearing about, right? God rest his soul.”

Will stares at Lonnie.

“What about ‘im?”

“El’s his daughter, Dad,” he says, wide-eyed as if to ask, *What’s wrong with you?*

Lonnie cocks his head. He leans into the wall right against Will’s favorite poster and clicks his tongue. “What kind of story is that? Hop’s daughter died years ago. Cancer.”

“He *adopted* El,” Will explains, throwing out his hands.

Stroking his patchy facial hair, Lonnie takes this in. “Well, poor girl. That still doesn’t answer my question, though, son. I asked how you ended up with her.”

“Hop and Mom were friends.”

“Back in high school.”

“Recently, Dad. She was there when he died,” Will snaps. His heart is heavy with memories of that night, the way Joyce clung to him when she made it out of that bunker alone, sobbed into his shoulder, whimpered breathlessly that agonized “He’s gone” when El approached, already knowing.

That revelation seems to go over Lonnie’s head completely. “That’s funny. I remember when Hop moved back to Hawkins. He and your mother wanted nothing to do with each other.”

“That was seven years ago. A lot changes in seven years.” Will pauses. “Hopper helped find me, you know. When I went missing.”

A silence settles over the room, solid and glassy enough to break with a hammer. There’s a coolness in Lonnie’s glare that steals away all the warmth beaming in from the afternoon sun through the windows. Slowly, Will tries to rub away the goosebumps on his forearms.

“I gotcha,” Lonnie finally says through a sigh. “She owes him, then?”

Will tosses his shoulders. “Whatever.”

“But that is just like your mother. She always thinks she’s doing the right thing, but she’s just biting off more than she can chew.”

“What are you really doing here, Dad?” Will asks suddenly. The more this goes on, the more his nerves are wearing away, like a rough surface sanded down to something more comfortable to grasp, something like anger, slipping into place.

“Come on, son. Don’t be like that. I’m here for you.”

“Really? Cause it kind of sounds like you’re just here to talk shit about Mom.”

Lonnie’s face drops into a scowl. “I don’t want to hear that tone from you again, Will. Got it?” he growls. “That’s not how you speak to your father – who came to surprise you for your birthday, need I

remind you.”

Will stares back at him helplessly. “I haven’t seen you in three years,” he deadpans. “I haven’t heard from you in three years. Not even a phone call, Dad.”

Lonnie rolls his eyes. “Not even – damn, of course. Of course!”

“What?”

“Lemme guess.” Lonnie pushes himself off the wall and walks slowly to come face-to-face with his son, expression radiating this casual scorn Will finds far scarier than the dark look he’d given him seconds earlier. “Your mom never told you I came to see her, huh? When you went missing.”

Will tenses. “I don’t...”

“Never mentioned I was there at your funeral? Never mentioned I boarded up the hole she took through the wall with an axe so she wouldn’t fuckin’ freeze to death? Never mentioned that I cared at all?”

“You didn’t,” Will murmurs.

“Really, I didn’t care that my own son went missing? I didn’t care that they thought they found your dead body in that quarry? Didn’t care we thought you were gone for days?” Lonnie shakes his head. “Is that what you think, son? Is that what your mother told you?”

“No!” Will slips away from in front of the desk, opening up space between himself and Lonnie by positioning himself in the center of the room. His pulse races. “She didn’t say any of that. I asked if you came to the funeral, and she said yes, and that was it.”

“And you never thought to question why you never heard from me yourself?” demands Lonnie. “I thought my son was dead. I find out he’s alive and, what, I have nothing to say about it?”

“You called?” Will croaks. His throat is tight.

“Of course I did.” Lonnie folds his arms and sighs. “But your mom,

she's the one who wouldn't let me talk to you. I bet she let you think I didn't give a shit. She was always like that. You know we had no money, Will. I had to find work any way I could and sometimes that meant I couldn't spend time with you or your brother. You think that means I didn't want to? I had to make sacrifices for this family and Joyce always accused me of bullshit excuses and blowing the two of you off."

Will looks at the floor. Tears are building at the corners of his eyes and he tries to hide them.

Lonnie picks up the green envelope from the desk. "You probably didn't receive the other birthday cards I've sent you either. She must've trashed 'em before they reached you. I had to get you this one in person so you actually had a chance of seeing it." He holds it out for Will to take, but Will doesn't budge. "Seems pretty drastic to fly two thousand miles just to hand you a stupid card, but that's how hard she's made it for me."

When Will still won't take it, Lonnie reaches forward, pries one of Will's hands from his side and puts it in his grip himself.

"Truth hurts, doesn't it?" Lonnie prompts.

"No..." says Will breathlessly.

"You can admit it, it's okay. I know you think she wants the best for you and Jonathan, but she's always let her resentment for me get in the way."

"No," Will repeats, this time a little louder. He glances back up, fist clenching around the envelope, bending it. "You have no idea what you're talking about."

Lonnie's eyes flare. He lurches Will's direction, making the boy flinch. "Oh, don't I? I'd only been married to the women sixteen years, and that's still longer than you've been alive, birthday boy."

A tear runs down Will's cheek. He blinks hard.

"God, not this. Haven't outgrown that fairy shit, have you?"

“Shut up!” Will snaps. “You’re wrong, Dad! You’re wrong! You don’t know Mom at all!”

Lonnie shoves his face into Will’s, fingers closing around his upper arms. “Speak to me that way again, Will, see what fuckin’ happens.”

“Mom saved me.” Will’s voice trembles through his accelerating tears. “She saved me – she saved me more than once! She never gave up on me.”

Lonnie chuckles darkly. “Let me explain something to you, son. You wanna know why your mother was really so upset when you disappeared? Cause she couldn’t handle the truth. It was her fault she let you out of her sight, and she couldn’t handle that she didn’t keep you safe, couldn’t handle that she didn’t hold everything together, couldn’t handle that she needed me all along.”

Will is so incredulous right now that he could laugh in his father’s face, but he wouldn’t dare. He just glares and shakes head, wishing he could burn a hole straight through Lonnie’s skull.

“For you own sake,” Lonnie growls, the smell of cigarettes heavy on his breath, “I hope you and your brother both come to your senses. Unfortunately, you’re half her crazy.”

“You couldn’t begin to understand what we’ve been through,” Will tells him. “And I’d rather be half her crazy than any part your bullshit.”

Lonnie pushes him. The envelope drops from his fingers as Will knocks into the closet door with a gasp, stunned beyond the capacity to stop himself from sliding to the floor. As Will’s knees hit the ground, he remembers being a kid again, curled up in the corner of his room in a chrysalis of blankets, trying to conceal the sound of his sobs and protect his paper-thin skin. Wrapped up in that darkness, he’d tell himself he’d never let his father see him this way again, never have to hear him say the words “queer” or “weak” or “crybaby”, never become anything that would make him want to walk away. Will thought he failed when it finally happened, when Lonnie shut the door on them for good, left Joyce standing in the kitchen too numb to cry anymore but too broken to go to sleep that

night, left Jonathan wanting to run away to a place that didn't exist and they'd have to build themselves. Still, all Will wanted was to be enough, talk himself into batting cages and biker bars for a root beer float while all along his skin squirmed across his bones and threatened to reveal the truth: that he'd never be what his father wanted him to be, that Lonnie made up his mind a long, long time ago.

Will raises his chin. He sees Lonnie's balled fists and his sneering lips, and the part of him that has always been afraid of that is drowned out by the oscillating waves of his anger. That child he used to be is still with him, but he retreats deeper down through the maze of a person Will has become, complicated and tangled up by his and his family's experiences over the last several years, the pain and the trauma Lonnie was lucky enough to miss out on. He would never understand, and Will is relieved that he doesn't need him to.

“The fuck you say to me?” Lonnie snarls.

Slowly, Will picks himself off the floor. He keeps his voice level as he mutters, “You should go.”

His father scoffs. “Come on, now. You gonna kick me just ‘cause you don’t want to hear the hard truths? You really are just like your mother.”

“Good,” Will says.

“*Good*,” he echoes, visage twisted in contempt.

“My mom is a hero,” Will tells him, taking a step forward. “My mom saved my life twice. She saved all of Hawkins. And I don’t care that you won’t believe that. She’s kind and she’s smart, and – and she’s strong. Stronger than you’ll ever know.” Will trembles with the force of his words. “And she always wants what’s best for us. Always. She doesn’t give up. Why wouldn’t I want to be like that? Why would I want to be anything else?”

Of course, Lonnie doesn’t seem to take any of this in. The derision darkening his eyes doesn’t shift at all. He says, “Don’t give her too much credit. I told her years ago she should have gotten out of that

shithole and look at you all now. Living it up in Cali-fuckin'-fornia, with some pig's kid no less. She always knew I was right. She just never wanted to admit it."

"Is that why you came here, then?" Will asks, wiping his tears with his thumb, "To say 'I told you so'? That means nothing to us. You don't know anything."

Once again, Lonnie gets in his face, gives a self-satisfied smirk as Will goes rigid. "Haven't had enough yet, boy?"

Whispering this time, Will reasserts, "You don't know *anything*."

"Then help me out, son, spell it out for me," Lonnie dares.

Will does something he has never done before. He pushes his father back, and Lonnie's eyes blow wide open in surprise. It is nothing like he had done to Will, not nearly as rough nor brimming with spite and the high of power. Just a firm distance to place between them that Will for once didn't have to run to create. "You used to be the worst thing that's ever happened to us," he confesses, "Now you don't even come close. Does that put things into perspective, Dad? Isn't it crazy how much can change in three years? But you haven't changed at all." Will stoops to pick up the crumpled envelope on the floor and he holds it out to Lonnie. "You're the same as you've ever been."

Lonnie snatches the envelope out of Will's hand. "Ungrateful little shit."

Will winces at this, but once the sting passes he closes his eyes, inhales deeply, and exhales nice and slow, feeling the weight in his chest dissolve. "Just go," he says.

"I sure as hell did not waste my money on that flight," Lonnie argues, throwing the card on Will's bed.

"You heard him."

Both Will and Lonnie look to the bedroom door, which had only been left an inch ajar when they entered. Standing in the doorway with her brown eyes fixed hotly in Lonnie's direction is Eleven, with Mike right over her shoulder.

“Excuse me,” snaps Lonnie, pivoting away from Will to face them. “I’m not going to have strangers tell me to get out of my son’s house.”

“This is my house too,” El replies, “And we both want you to leave. Will is my family now. Family protects each other.”

“Protect,” Lonnie scoffs.

“You heard them,” Mike growls. “We’ll call the cops if you don’t go.”

“So, go.” For a moment, Will is grateful El is still without her telekinetic powers, because by the severity of her tone, he can all too easily picture this encounter ending with some broken bones if it had to, all of them belonging to his father.

Lonnie realizes he is outnumbered. Shaking his head in disbelief, he throws one final cold glower at his son, who in turn ignores him by maintaining his stare on his friends, a small, thankful smile tugging at his lips. Lonnie storms out of the room, quick enough to disturb the drawings on the desk and make Mike stumble as he shoves past him. They hear him stomp down the stairs, the opening and slamming of the front door which shakes the house, and all three watch as he gets back into the rental car parked crookedly on the driveway and takes off with whining tires.

El takes Will by the shoulder. “Will he be back?”

“I don’t think so. Not unless he’s looking for a round two with Jonathan later,” murmurs Will.

“You okay?” says Mike gently, eyes on his friend.

Will steps back from the window as a long, quivering sigh cascades from his lungs. “I’m okay,” he answers, feeling it might be at least half true. “How much of that did you guys hear?”

“We heard you fall.”

“We were going to interrupt sooner but –”

“You sounded like you were saying things he needed to hear.”

“I don’t know what he needs,” Will admits with a shrug. He sits on his bed and notices the still-unopened envelope tossed onto the pillow. He grabs it. A fingertip traces the wrinkled letters of his name over and over again. “But one thing I know for sure is that I don’t need him. I haven’t for a long time.”

He rips the envelope in half and drops it into the wastebin. Mike and Eleven follow him out of the room, and downstairs, they abandon their game, share the chocolate amongst themselves, and lie on the sofa in a pile, watching TV beneath the Byers family portrait until Jonathan comes home with dinner and absolutely no idea what he’d missed.

**Author's Note:**

Thanks for reading! Leave a comment, if you please!  
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